

My name is Suzy Friedman and I am a Staff Scientist at the Center for Conservation Incentives at Environmental Defense. I work on agriculture conservation projects with farmers and other partners in Virginia and a number of other states, as well as on Farm Bill policy. Environmental Defense is a leading national nonprofit organization, representing more than 400,000 members. Since 1967, Environmental Defense has linked science, economics, law and innovative private-sector partnerships to create breakthrough solutions to the most serious environmental problems. It has a long history of working on farm policy reform, including the expansion and reform of USDA conservation programs in the 2002 Farm Bill.

America's farm policies could do much more to help our farmers stay on the land —and do much more to help the environment.

It's no surprise that private landowners dramatically impact the air we breathe, the quality of America's rivers, lakes and bays, or the fate of the nation's wildlife. Farmers produce much more than food and fiber — they also produce clean water, clean air, habitat for wildlife, and serve as the frontline against sprawl.

The simple fact of the matter is that farmers, ranchers and private foresters manage more than half the American landscape. Unless we reward these landowners when they take steps to help the environment, we can't possibly hope to meet some of our nation's most pressing environmental challenges.

Fortunately, farmers, ranchers and private forest landowners all over America are anxious to help.

Unfortunately, more than 100,000 farmers are turned away every year when they ask the U.S. Department of Agriculture to share the cost of environmental improvements.

Overall, three-out-four farmers seeking stewardship incentives from USDA are turned away. For example, farmers offering to permanently protect farmland through the Farm and Ranchland Protection Program face a \$100 million backlog nationally.

Here in Virginia, the backlog in 2004 for the EQIP program totaled \$17.6 million, and the backlog for the Grasslands Reserve Program totaled \$1.4 million. USDA conservation programs are vital to Virginia's farmers and communities, and are especially important to those in the Shenandoah Valley, under great pressure to meet water quality goals related to the Chesapeake Bay.

This is a big problem — for farmers, for our rural communities, and for the environment.

That's why we need your help if we're going to convince Congress to double funding for conservation programs like EQIP, FRPP, CREP, and many others when Congress reauthorizes federal farm programs in 2007.

Doubling conservation funding in the next Farm Bill will do much more than help the environment.

Doubling conservation funding will also help many more farmers stay on the land.

That's because all farmers, ranchers and private foresters -- regardless of what they grow or where they live -- are eligible for USDA conservation payments.

By contrast, only one-third of America's farmers grow row crops that are eligible for traditional income subsidies that get so much attention in the press. And, most of those subsidized farmers are concentrated in a handful of states.

It's become increasingly clear current our subsidy system -- which costs more than \$20 billion in some years -- is not doing enough to help most of America's farmers. Despite spending more than \$100 billion between 1997 and 2002, we lost about 87,000 farms. One reason is that subsidies that drive up the cost of renting land are driving some farmers out of business.

That's why we're working with agricultural economists, farmers and trade experts to develop a new safety net that helps many more farmers weather the financial ups and downs of agriculture, that aren't tied to how much you produce, and that will comply with our trade agreements and that will pave the way for new treaties that open overseas markets to our farm products.

A new smarter safety net, combined with increased conservation funding and expanded incentives to create new markets at home and abroad, will help many more farmers stay on the land, will help the environment, help farmers avoid new regulations, and will rejuvenate our rural communities.

The time is ripe for reform.

Many trends -- discontent with our farm subsidies at home and abroad, rising deficits, growing demand for healthy food, increasing regulatory pressures -- make farm policy reform not only possible but inevitable.

What's clear is that we must do more to help our farmers -- to help them stay profitable, and to help them when they offer to help the environment.

I look forward to working with you.

Suzy Friedman  
Environmental Defense  
202-572-3376